

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

PART TWENTY-SEVEN - Chapters 26 and 27

Paul's defence before King Herod Agrippa II is the third version of his testimony in Acts. At first sight it seems curious that with so much we might have been told about the exploits of the apostles, the Holy Spirit chose to inspire Luke to write the same story three times. When we compare the three accounts it is immediately apparent that there are many details in each story that are not contained in the other two, all of which add to our understanding of what happened. The differences are also significant because they show how Paul carefully crafted his messages in the light of his knowledge of his audience. The first account(9) is the way he told it to Luke, a Greek doctor, and contains very little Jewish background but it does explain carefully the struggle Ananias had with the Lord before he did what he was told. The second testimony was given to a hostile Jewish crowd who a few minutes before had been trying to kill Paul.(22) It is told from a strongly Jewish point of view by a fellow Jew who had once thought and acted as they now were. This third time Paul is addressing a king who though an Edomite had grown up among the Jews his family had ruled for a hundred years. He knew a great deal about the Jews and was somewhat attracted by their faith without being one of them.(26:1-3)

Agrippa would have been familiar with Paul's background,(26:4,5) and the theological disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection.(26:6-8) He would have been aware as a young boy when the Jewish authorities began their campaign against the followers of Jesus(8:1), and later when his own father supported them by executing the apostle, James.(Acts 12:1,2) He may not have known that the man who started that campaign was the same man who now stood before him as himself a disciple of Jesus. As a king under the sovereignty of the Roman Emperor he certainly knew exactly what it meant to be part of a chain of authority.(26:9-12) He would have been likely to put himself in Paul's place as he heard him relate how while exercising his authority from the high priest, the King of Heaven over-rode that authority(26:13-15) and gave him new instructions.(26:16-18) As Paul referred to the 'goads' of conscience against which he had fought, Agrippa would probably have reflected on his own pricking conscience when as an agent of Rome or for his own gain he had abused the freedom of his subjects. He could not help but hear Paul's very simple summary of the gospel of forgiveness and a new life in Christ through repentance and faith which changes us from being citizens of Satan's kingdom to God's domain.(26:18-20) This explanation was set in Agrippa's world so he would have had no trouble understanding exactly what it was about. He could see the unreasonableness of Jewish opposition to a man being true to their own scriptures.(26:21-23) He would have been very open to the appeal of a message sent by God to both Jew and Gentile, standing as he did half way between the two.(26:23)

When Festus, sensing perhaps that Paul was getting through to the king and that the whole situation was getting out of hand, could restrain himself no longer, (26:24) Paul firmly put him in his place and addressed his appeal to Agrippa. (26:25-27) Agrippa acknowledged how close he was to a faith in Christ and Paul responded with a passionate plea to the king and all his hearers to join him as fellow believers, but without the chains they compelled him to wear.(26:28-29) The hearing came to an abrupt end as the judges withdrew to consider their verdict. There was no doubt; he was not guilty - but they stood aside from getting involved because their own comfortable positions were at stake and left Paul's case to the whim of a crazy Emperor.(26:30-32)

27:1,2 Q.1 As usual Luke gave us detailed information about Paul's travelling companions, the ship and its intended route. Why? Which Christians accompanied him? Why do you suppose they came along? What happened to them

when they got to Rome?(Col.4:7-14) Do we stick with friends through hard times? Why not?

27:3-8 Q.2 Which other centurions in the New Testament showed themselves to be sympathetic towards the Christian gospel or at least fair and kind to individual Christians?(Matt.8:5; 27:54; Acts 10) How did Paul's good early relationship with this centurion prove to be all important later in the story? Was the convenient provision of a ship going to Rome a sign that this trip was in the will of God? Or were the difficult weather conditions an indication that it was not His will?

27:9-12 Q.3 How did Paul know that the voyage would be dangerous? Was it his past experience of sailing in this part of the world? Was his prediction totally accurate? Since his advice was ignored was it a waste of time to give it? What can we learn from this incident about the influence we may have on the decisions of unbelievers?

27:13-20 Q.4 What does this story show us of the way non-Christians make decisions? How then did they handle adverse circumstances? What happened to their morale as things got more and more out of hand? Why didn't Paul make any comment before verse 21? What can we learn from his silence?

27:21-26 Q.5 What did Paul now tell them would be the outcome of the storm? What were the chief grounds for his confidence? Is there a place for saying, 'I told you so!?' How did his advice differ from the previous time in verse 10? Why was this? What course of action did he now urge upon them? Why did he not tell them how to run the ship?

27:27-32 Q.6 What did the sailors plan to do? Should we be surprised when unbelievers think only of themselves at such times? What was Paul's advice to the centurion? Why did he take it this time? What do you suppose it was about Paul that caused a change in the centurion's attitude to his counsel? How can we expect similar things to happen in our lives?

27:33-37 Q.7 Having been listened to at last, how did Paul build upon the opportunity? How did he suggest dealing with the near mutiny among the sailors? What effect would Paul's prayer before they ate have upon the other 275 people on board? Why was his advice to eat so important at this point?

27:38-44 Q.8 How did they finally make it safely to land? How did God use the centurion to accomplish his purpose? Who was really in charge of the ship at this stage? How does this cast light on what Jesus meant when He said that He had given us authority?(Matt.28:18-20)